

Paris Climate Agreement

Background

At COP 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015, Parties to the UNFCCC reached a landmark agreement to combat climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future. The Paris Agreement builds upon the [Convention](#) and – for the first time – brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so. As such, it charts a new course in the global climate effort.

The Paris Agreement’s central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Additionally, the agreement aims to increase the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change, and at making finance flows consistent with a low GHG emissions and climate-resilient pathway. To reach these ambitious goals, appropriate mobilization and provision of financial resources, a new technology framework and enhanced capacity-building is to be put in place, thus supporting action by developing countries and the most vulnerable countries, in line with their own national objectives. The Agreement also provides for an enhanced transparency framework for action and support.

The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through “nationally determined contributions” ([NDCs](#)) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts. There will also be a global stocktake every 5 years to assess the collective progress towards achieving the purpose of the agreement and to inform further individual actions by Parties.

Necessity

The Paris Agreement opened for signature on 22 April 2016 – Earth Day – at UN Headquarters in New York. It entered into force on 4 November 2016, 30 days after the so-called “double threshold” (ratification by 55 countries that account for at least 55% of global emissions) had been met. Since then, more countries have ratified and continue to ratify the Agreement, reaching a total of 125 Parties in early 2017. The current number of ratifications can be found [here](#).

In order to make the Paris Agreement fully operational, a work programme was launched in Paris to develop modalities, procedures and guidelines on a broad array of issues. Since 2016, Parties work together in the subsidiary bodies ([APA](#), SBSTA and SBI) and various constituted bodies. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) met for the first time in conjunction with COP 22 in Marrakesh (in November 2016) and adopted its first two decisions. The work programme is expected to be completed by 2018.

The Paris Agreement, adopted through Decision [1/CP.21](#), addresses crucial areas necessary to combat climate change. Some of the key aspects of the Agreement are set out below:

- **Long-term temperature goal** (Art. 2) – The Paris Agreement, in seeking to strengthen the global response to climate change, reaffirms the goal of limiting global temperature increase to well below 2 degrees Celsius, while pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees.
- **Global peaking and 'climate neutrality'** (Art. 4) – To achieve this temperature goal, Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) as soon as possible, recognizing peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of GHGs in the second half of the century.
- **Mitigation** (Art. 4) – The Paris Agreement establishes binding commitments by all Parties to prepare, communicate and maintain a nationally determined contribution (NDC) and to pursue domestic measures to achieve them. It also prescribes that Parties shall communicate their NDCs every 5 years and provide information necessary for clarity and transparency. To set a firm foundation for higher ambition, each successive NDC will represent a progression beyond the previous one and reflect the highest possible ambition. Developed countries should continue to take the lead by undertaking absolute economy-wide reduction targets, while developing countries should continue enhancing their mitigation efforts, and are encouraged to move toward economy-wide targets over time in the light of different national circumstances.

- **Sinks and reservoirs (Art.5)** –The Paris Agreement also encourages Parties to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of GHGs as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1(d) of the Convention, including forests.
- **Voluntary cooperation/Market- and non-market-based approaches (Art. 6)** – The Paris Agreement recognizes the possibility of voluntary cooperation among Parties to allow for higher ambition and sets out principles – including environmental integrity, transparency and robust accounting – for any cooperation that involves internationally transferal of mitigation outcomes. It establishes a mechanism to contribute to the mitigation of GHG emissions and support sustainable development, and defines a framework for non-market approaches to sustainable development.
- **Adaptation (Art. 7)** – The Paris Agreement establishes a global goal on adaptation – of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change in the context of the temperature goal of the Agreement. It aims to significantly strengthen national adaptation efforts, including through support and international cooperation. It recognizes that adaptation is a global challenge faced by all. All Parties should engage in adaptation, including by formulating and implementing National Adaptation Plans, and should submit and periodically update an adaptation communication describing their priorities, needs, plans and actions. The adaptation efforts of developing countries should be recognized
- **Loss and damage (Art. 8)** – The Paris Agreement recognizes the importance of averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events, and the role of sustainable development in reducing the risk of loss and damage. Parties are to enhance understanding, action and support, including through the Warsaw International Mechanism, on a cooperative and facilitative basis with respect to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change.
- **Finance, technology and capacity-building support (Art. 9, 10 and 11)** – The Paris Agreement reaffirms the obligations of developed countries to support the efforts of developing country Parties to build clean, climate-resilient futures, while for the first time encouraging voluntary contributions by other Parties. Provision of resources should also aim to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation. In addition to reporting on finance already provided, developed country Parties commit to submit indicative information on future support every two

years, including projected levels of public finance. The agreement also provides that the Financial Mechanism of the Convention, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), shall serve the Agreement. International cooperation on climate-safe technology development and transfer and building capacity in the developing world are also strengthened: a technology framework is established under the Agreement and capacity-building activities will be strengthened through, inter alia, enhanced support for capacity building actions in developing country Parties and appropriate institutional arrangements. Climate change education, training as well as public awareness, participation and access to information (Art 12) is also to be enhanced under the Agreement.

- ***Climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information***
- ***Transparency (Art. 13), implementation and compliance (Art. 15)*** – The Paris Agreement relies on a robust transparency and accounting system to provide clarity on action and support by Parties, with flexibility for their differing capabilities of Parties. In addition to reporting information on mitigation, adaptation and support, the Agreement requires that the information submitted by each Party undergoes international technical expert review. The Agreement also includes a mechanism that will facilitate implementation and promote compliance in a non-adversarial and non-punitive manner, and will report annually to the CMA.
- ***Global Stocktake (Art. 14)*** – A “global stocktake”, to take place in 2023 and every 5 years thereafter, will assess collective progress toward achieving the purpose of the Agreement in a comprehensive and facilitative manner. It will be based on the best available science and its long-term global goal. Its outcome will inform Parties in updating and enhancing their actions and support and enhancing international cooperation on climate action.
- ***Decision 1/CP.21*** also sets out a number of measures to enhance action prior to 2020, including strengthening the technical examination process, enhancement of provision of urgent finance, technology and support and measures to strengthen high-level engagement. For 2018 a facilitative dialogue is envisaged to take stock of collective progress towards the long-term emission reduction goal of Art 4. The decision also welcomes the efforts of all non-Party stakeholders to address and respond to climate change, including those of civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other subnational authorities. These stakeholders are invited to scale up their efforts and showcase them via the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate

Action platform (<http://climateaction.unfccc.int>). Parties also recognized the need to strengthen the knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples, as well as the important role of providing incentives through tools such as domestic policies and carbon pricing.

Role of India

- In the lead-up to the Paris meeting, the UN tasked countries to submit plans detailing how they intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Those plans were technically referred to as intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs). By December 10, 2015, 185 countries had submitted measures to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 or 2030. The U.S. announced in 2014 its intention to reduce its emissions 26–28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. To help accomplish that goal, the country’s Clean Power Plan was to set limits on existing and planned power plant emissions. China, the country with the largest total greenhouse gas emissions, set its target for the peaking of its carbon dioxide emissions “around 2030 and making best efforts to peak early.” Chinese officials also endeavoured to lower carbon dioxide emissions per unit of gross domestic product (GDP) by 60–65 percent from the 2005 level.
- India’s INDC noted the challenges of eradicating poverty while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. About 24 percent of the global population without access to electricity (304 million) resided in India. Nevertheless, the country planned to “reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35 percent by 2030” versus the 2005 levels. The country also sought to derive about 40 percent of its electric power from renewable energy sources rather than from fossil fuels by 2030. The INDC noted that the implementation plans would not be affordable from domestic resources: it estimated that at least \$2.5 trillion would be needed to accomplish climate-change actions through 2030. India would achieve that goal with the help of technology transfer (the movement of skills and equipment from more-developed countries to less-developed countries [LDCs]) and international finance, including assistance from the Green Climate Fund (a program designed to assist, through investments in low-emission technologies and climate-resilient development, populations vulnerable to the effects of climate change).

Negotiations and Agreement

One of the main sticking points of the negotiations was the issue of transferring funds from developed countries to LDCs, because developed countries did not want to be the only ones paying the costs. Moreover, even if the commitments of the countries were fulfilled, it was unlikely that temperatures would be limited to an increase of 2 °C (3.6 °F). Many countries, especially the island states threatened by rising sea levels, wanted to restrict warming to 1.5 °C (2.7 °F).

- After nearly two weeks of difficult negotiations that sometimes lasted through the night, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, who presided over the talks, announced on December 12 the adoption of the Paris Agreement. He noted that the accord aimed to hold the increase of global temperatures “to well below 2 °C above preindustrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C.” To achieve this objective, he announced that the parties should “aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible...and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter.” The goal was to achieve a balance after 2050 between atmospheric inputs of greenhouse gases by emission sources (such as electrical power plants and engines that burn fossil fuels for energy) and removal into sinks (forests, oceans, and soil, which could be combined with technologies to extract and sequester carbon dioxide from power plants). The agreement also recognized the need of LDCs to improve their economies and reduce poverty, which made immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions difficult. As a result, it called on developing countries to enhance their mitigation efforts and move toward emission reduction or limitation targets, while it underscored the need for developed countries to continue to meet their emission reduction targets.
- The Paris Agreement specified no new funding targets but noted that developed countries should provide financial resources to help LDCs “in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention,” such as the COP16 commitment of \$100 billion per year from developed countries by 2020. (Approximately \$10.3 billion had been raised by May 2018.) That funding was to support both mitigation and adaptation efforts. Funding from developed countries would come from a number of different mechanisms, presumably to include grants, equipment, and technical expertise.

After Ratification

By early 2017 the only sovereign countries that had not signed were [Nicaragua](#) and [Syria](#). However, the inauguration of [Donald J. Trump](#) as [U.S.](#) president in January 2017 heralded a new era in U.S. [climate](#) policy, and on June 1, 2017, he signaled his intention to pull the U.S. out of the climate agreement after the formal exiting process concluded, which could happen as early as November 4, 2020. In spite of the pending exit by the U.S., 187 countries had both signed and ratified the agreement by November 2019.

